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ABSTRACT

The exercises in this pamphlet were designed to help United States Air Force personnel improve the effectiveness of their writing. Rules and exercises are provided in the following areas: (1) organizing ideas (paragraphs, subparagraphs, the main point, and reader needs); (2) speaking on paper--using personal pronouns, contractions, small words, and questions; (3) avoiding needless words; and (4) solving special problems, such as passive verbs, instructions, and parallelism. A checklist for effective writing, suggestions for using simpler words and phrases, and a list of books on writing are attached. (RL)

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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
Headquarters US Air Force
Washington DC 20330

AF PAMPHLET 13-5

2 January 1980

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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Writing Improvement

US AIR FORCE EFFECTIVE WRITING COURSE

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WHY WRITE WELL?

Write well because so many readers are at your mercy. In the Air Force, we rarely write to just one person. Even our most routine work is likely to receive many readings–from secretaries, supervisors, and addressees. The quality of writing in a single office memo or bulletin notice, for example, can help the productivity of dozens of readers or slow it down. Give those readers a break. They can throw away a bad sales letter, but they have to read your official one.

Write well because poor writing hurts more than readers. A confusing instruction can wreck a plane. A clumsy evaluation can wreck the career of a fine subordinate. At its worst, poor writing leads to lives lost and programs rejected. We can learn today from what Air Force Secretary Zuckert said in 1963: "I am convinced that our effectiveness in dealing with the Office of the Secretary of Defense has suffered by the poor impression we have made in our papers." Look at it this way: to your readers, you are what you write. When your writing is ineffective, it hurts both your credibility and your organization's. It suggests ineffectiveness in general.

Write well to help yourself. By turning the impressions in your head into clear writing, you improve thinking. In the process, your career is likely to improve. Management experts rank skill in communicating among the top requirements for success. You benefit when you save reviewers from having to tinker. (Sure, some reviewers tinker compulsively, but poor writing begs them to make "improvements.") Then, too, from writing well comes the simple satisfaction of doing your job well.

Write well because the Air Force needs effective writing more than ever before. Air Force complexity is growing, and with it grows the need for writing that helps us cope with that complexity. This doesn't mean you must polish every phrase to poetic perfection; few of us can be poets. All of us, however, can master everyday writing. The Air Force turns out a staggering 500 million pages of such writing each year. The cost in salary time to read all that paperwork *just once* comes to $120 million. Don't make the cost any higher. See that for each of your readers, once is enough.

★ ★ ★

ABOUT THIS COURSE

This course teaches the principles of the Air Force Academy's Executive Writing Course in a format better suited to presentation on film. In the Academy course, we work with audiences to improve writing that they submit in advance. Unable to have that kind of audience participation in this course, we decided to use three short films and reinforcing exercises.

Using as our model the British film *Letter Writing At Work*, we wrote scripts to show the process of writing by following one writer as he improves one letter. The Aerospace Audio-Visual Service then filmed the scripts using professional actors. As for the exercises in this pamphlet, they're also the work of professionals —you, the writers who make Air Force paperwork work.

To make it work better, this course offers practical solutions to the most common problems of Air Force writing: wordiness, formality, and poor organization. Though there's more to writing than this course covers, little is more important.

We've skipped grammar and punctuation because most Air Force writing is mechanically correct. Verbs agree with subjects (when kept together), sentences are complete (when kept short), and so on. In fact we've seen a lot of Air Force writing that is perfectly correct and yet perfectly awful. Why? Well, the writers haven't concentrated on the most important thing—saying what they mean. Our advice is to work on being clear and accurate, for the mechanics will usually take care of themselves.

Formats aren't part of this course, either. They vary from one command to another, and errors in them do far less damage than a bureaucratic writing style. You'll find help with formats in AFR 10-1 or *Tongue and Quill*.

Finally, we can only call attention here to the worst obstacles to better Air Force writing: individual habit and bureaucratic inertia. Maybe because writing is so personal and painful, many people stick to certain writing habits even when they're the inefficient ones so common in the Air Force. Writing improvement becomes especially hard when you add to individual habit the pressures against change in a large organization. Old heads train new ones, old letters make convenient models, and old ways seem the safest ways. And so, many people continue to write in a style that would get a lot of laughs if it didn't do such damage.

Overcoming individual habit and bureaucratic inertia takes initiative. Don't wait for the next guy. If you're a writer, start using the advice in this course. If you're a reviewer, start letting people know that you welcome modern writing. For this course to work, *you* must make it work.

Major Tom Murawski
Department of English
US Air Force Academy

"The mission of the Air Force is to fly and write—and don't you forget it."

~~OR~~
~~ORGAN~~
ORGANIZING YOUR IDEAS

Plan what to say.

Wait! Your writing will be clear only if your thinking is clear. So before you reach for your pen or dictation equipment, think about what you're going to say. If you're writing for someone else's signature, get any special instructions on content and format. If you have more points to make than you can juggle in your head, make a list of random ideas and then rearrange them in the best order. Next write a draft and revise it ruthlessly. To be easy on your reader, you must be hard on yourself.

Group related information into paragraphs.

Cover one topic completely before starting another, and let a topic take several paragraphs if necessary. But keep your paragraphs short, down to roughly four or five sentences. By adding white space, you make reading easier. Use subparagraphs to make lists and instructions stand out. And try more headings, especially when you must cover many different topics, so your reader can follow quickly. Effective writing *looks* inviting.

Open with your main point.

What's the one sentence you'd keep if you could keep only one? That's your main point. Don't force readers to search for it; reveal the main point by the end of the first paragraph. You can often place it in the very first sentence, in a paragraph by itself for added clarity. Put requests *before* justifications, answers *before* explanations, solutions *before* problems, and conclusions *before* evidence.

You might delay the main point to soften bad news or to remind your reader of an old conversation, for example, but avoid delaying long. Readers, like listeners, are put off by people who take forever to get to the point. They need to know the main point at the start so they can appreciate the relevance of whatever else you say.

Occasionally, as in a set of instructions or a reply to a series of questions, all your points may be equally important. In this case, create a starting sentence that tells your readers what to expect, like this: "Here's the manning information you asked for."

Stick to what your reader needs.

Analyze your readers in light of your subject. How are they involved? What do they know already? What do they need to know now? Though you can't anticipate all the concerns your readers may have, you should anticipate the main ones. Address them in advance. By saving readers the trouble of asking for clarification, you'll be more persuasive.

Remember to explain unfamiliar terms or, better, avoid them entirely. Remember also that facts and figures don't speak for themselves; you must say what your details mean. Write to help your readers.

4
Effective Writing

* * *

Be selective. Be concise. Don't tell someone what you know. Tell them what they need to know, what it means, and why it matters.

—General David C. Jones as Air Force Chief of Staff

In the following letter, the information below the first paragraph can be grouped into two more paragraphs. Decide which sentences to group into paragraph 2 and which to group into paragraph 3. Use the subject caption and paragraph 1 to help you decide. (Don't worry about the order of the sentences in the paragraphs.)

SUBJECT: Ways to Save Energy and Water

1. We need your help in saving energy and water in family housing. As a family-housing occupant, you can have an immediate effect on the operating costs of Fairchild AFB by taking some simple steps.

a. Use only 40-watt bulbs in outside lights.

b. Set your thermostat on 68 degrees in the day and 65 at night.

c. Though we don't expect the severe water shortage of last year, we must still cut down on watering lawns.

d. Take the following steps to save energy.

e. Water only in the early morning (0600-0900) and evening (1600-2000).

f. If your quarters number is even, water only on even-numbered days; if odd, water on odd-numbered days.

g. If you have both doors open during the day, further lower your thermostat, so the breeze you create won't force the furnace to run.

h. This schedule will save water and still keep your lawn healthy.

i. Turn off any lights you don't need, and teach your children to do the same.

SENTENCES FOR PARAGRAPH 2: _____

SENTENCES FOR PARAGRAPH 3: _____

Sentences for Paragraph 2 (energy): *a b d g i*

Sentences for Paragraph 3 (water): *c e f h*

If you avoided watering down the energy tips (that's a pun), then you have the idea on paragraphs: cover one topic completely before starting another. We put the energy paragraph before the watering one because the subject caption and first paragraph use that order. When topics don't divide so neatly, start new paragraphs where your thinking takes a turn.

Notice that the writer of this letter, like the writer in the film, overcame any urge to begin with a lot of needless history. If you received this letter, you'd know right away that it had to do with you.

Paragraph 2 of the following letter gives instructions in an effective order, but they'd be easier to read if spread into subparagraphs. Show where you'd start subparagraphs by writing the opening words of each one next to the appropriate letter.

SUBJECT: Personal Advertisements in the Base Bulletin

1. Air Force military and civilian personnel stationed at Elmendorf AFB may now advertise personal items for sale or rent in the base bulletin.

2. We can print your personal advertisement only if you follow these guidelines. Submit an ad only one time. We can't run a personal ad more than once, for that would amount to commercial advertising. Type your ad or neatly print it on EAFB Form 321, "Notice for Base Bulletin." Whether you type or print, you should underline each item, briefly describe it if necessary, include the price, and give your phone number. The entire ad should run no more than three typed lines. Send the form to DAO by 0900 on a Tuesday to get it in that Thursday's bulletin.

SUBJECT: Personal Advertisements in the Base Bulletin

1. Air Force military and civilian personnel stationed at Elmendorf AFB may now advertise personal items for sale or rent in the base bulletin.

2. We can print your personal advertisement only if you follow these guidelines:

a. _____

_____

b. _____

_____

c. _____

_____

Here's paragraph 2 with all the words:

2. We can print your personal advertisement only if you follow these guidelines:

a. Submit an ad only one time. We can't run a personal ad more than once, for that would amount to commercial advertising.

b. Type your ad or neatly print it on EAFB Form 321, "Notice for Base Bulletin." Whether you type or print, you should underline each item, briefly describe it if necessary, include the price, and give your phone number. The entire ad should run no more than three typed lines.

c. Send the form to DAO by 0900 on a Tuesday to get it in that Thursday's bulletin.

To make items in lists and steps in instructions stand out, use subparagraphs the way we did here. The added white space and a-b-c divisions help a reader to follow at a glance. Simple writing is not simple-minded! It's simply courteous.

Here's one letter organized three ways. Which version displays the main point best? Circle your answer at the bottom of the page. Also, rewrite the subject caption to make it more specific.

A. SUBJECT: Training Capability

1. Our main control tower will be off the air for installation of new communications equipment from 1 Feb through 30 Apr.

2. During this period, air traffic control will be conducted out of two TSW-7 mobile control towers. We're scheduled to train five three-level controllers then, but the mobile towers are too small to hold both controllers and trainees.

3. Therefore, we request that you delay sending us air traffic controllers with three-level skills until after 30 Apr.

B. SUBJECT: Training Capability

1. We request that you delay sending us air traffic controllers with three-level skills until after 30 Apr.

2. Our main control tower will be off the air for installation of new communications equipment from 1 Feb through 30 Apr. During this period, air traffic control will be conducted out of two TSW-7 mobile control towers. We're scheduled to train five three-level controllers then, but the mobile towers are too small to hold both controllers and trainees.

C. SUBJECT: Training Capability

1. We request that you delay sending us air traffic controllers with three-level skills until after 30 Apr. Our main control tower will be off the air for installation of new communications equipment from 1 Feb through 30 Apr.

2. During this period, air traffic control will be conducted out of two TSW-7 mobile control towers. We're scheduled to train five three-level controllers then, but the mobile towers are too small to hold both controllers and trainees.

CIRCLE ONE: A B C

SPECIFIC SUBJECT: _____

B displays the main point best. The one sentence you'd keep if you could keep only one—the request—appears at the very beginning of the letter. It even appears in a paragraph by itself for added clarity. For a specific subject, we suggest *Request to Delay Controller Arrivals.*

C is second best. Although the request appears at the start, the top paragraph ends with a sentence that really belongs in the bottom paragraph with the rest of the explanation.

A is the last because it takes too long to reveal that the letter is about more than just the control towers.

Here's another letter organized three ways. Again, which version displays the main point best?

A. SUBJECT: Request for Telephones

1. We have reviewed your request of 22 Nov, same subject. A unit's mission determines the kind of phone we can put in. If a unit's mission supports the base mission directly, it can have Class A phones. If a unit's mission supports the base mission only indirectly, it can have only Class C phones.

2. While the tailor shop must get Class C phones, all the other units you asked about qualify for Class A phones. Please use the attached form to order equipment.

B. SUBJECT: Request for Telephones

1. We have reviewed your request of 22 Nov, same subject. While the tailor shop must get Class C phones, all the other units you asked about qualify for Class A phones.

2. A unit's mission determines the kind of phone we can put in. If a unit's mission supports the base mission directly, it can have Class A phones. If a unit's mission supports the base mission only indirectly, it can have only Class C phones. Please use the attached form to order equipment.

C. SUBJECT: Request for Telephones (Your ltr, 22 Nov)

1. While the tailor shop must get Class C phones, all the other units you asked about qualify for Class A phones.

2. A unit's mission determines the kind of phone we can put in. If a unit's mission supports the base mission directly, it can have Class A phones. If a unit's mission supports the base mission only indirectly, it can have only Class C phones. Please use the attached form to order equipment.

CIRCLE ONE: A B C

A is way off. It gives the general theory of phone service before getting to what the reader needs most—an answer. *B* is better. At least the main point comes in the top paragraph. But *B* clutters the strongest part of the letter, the opening, with a reference that belongs in the subject caption. So *C* is best. It doesn't leave the reader hanging.

Did you notice that the paragraph you just read makes the mistake we want you to avoid? We spared no expense to delay the answer for the exercise until the end. With a little tinkering, we could have told you right away that *C* is best.

Improve the letter below by opening with the main point and following with only what a reader needs. You don't have to reword the letter. Just put the most important sentence first and cross out unnecessary ones.

SUBJECT: Staff Assistance Visit for your Individualized Newcomer Treatment and Orientation (INTRO) Program

1. As you are aware, the INTRO program is an essential part of a people-minded Air Force. Accordingly, a staff assistance visit was conducted to evaluate your unit's program in accordance with AFR 35-35. As an evaluation guide, we used a checklist that insured adequate coverage of all appropriate areas.

2. Your INTRO program is satisfactory. We found no significant problems during our 2 June visit. Well done.

3. No reply to this report is needed.

DUNAGIN'S PEOPLE

"THIS REPORT IS BRIEF, INFORMATIVE, AND TO THE POINT... YOU'D BETTER DO IT OVER."

by permission of Field Newspaper Syndicate

(AFR 35-35)

SUBJECT: Staff Assistance Visit for your Individualized Newcomer Treatment and Orientation (INTRO) Program

~~1. As you are aware, the INTRO program is a essential part of a people-minded Air Force. Accordingly, a staff assistance visit was conducted to evaluate your unit's program in accordance with AFR 35-35. As an evaluation guide, we used a checklist that insured adequate coverage of all appropriate areas.~~

~~2.~~ Your INTRO program is satisfactory. We found no significant problems during our 2 June visit. Well done.

~~3. No reply to this report is needed.~~

If you received this letter, wouldn't you want to know right away how the visit turned out? The writer may have included the first paragraph to overcome the tyranny of the blank page by putting something—anything—on paper. Then again, the writer may have included the paragraph out of a mistaken wish to provide the "courtesy" of bulk. Whatever the reason, the first paragraph gives more background information than a reader needs, so we cut all but the regulation.

The suggested answer puts the regulation in the subject caption. Do the same when you must cite a governing directive to keep it from cluttering the body of a letter.

Your answer may not match ours exactly. For example, you may have kept "No reply to this report is needed." We dropped it because the visit turned up no problems to reply to. The decision to keep the sentence or drop it is a judgment call. (Writing is hard work precisely because it requires so many judgment calls.)

Improve this letter from a major-command headquarters to Air Force Headquarters. Open with the main point and follow with only what a reader needs. You needn't do much rewording. Just rearrange the sequence of some sentences and drop others entirely. Write your answer in the box.

SUBJECT: Request to Expand Bomb Range C-22

The attached request is forwarded for your consideration. The package has been reviewed at this headquarters and our approval has been given. The bomb-range expansion is small, temporary, and unlikely to increase danger. Therefore, we recommend that you approve the attached request.

SUBJECT: Request to Expand Bomb Range C-22

SUBJECT: Request to Expand Bomb Range C-22

~~The attached request is forwarded for your consideration. The package has been reviewed at this headquarters and our approval has been given.~~ The bomb-range expansion is small, temporary, and unlikely to increase danger. ~~Therefore,~~ We recommend that you approve the attached request.

An early main point gives writers and readers a way to test the relevance of whatever else is said. In the letter about the INTRO program, "the bottom line" was buried in the middle. In this letter, "the bottom line" really is at the bottom. By moving it to the top, the first two sentences of the original become noticeably unnecessary.

Are you a *therefore, consequently,* or *due to the above* writer? Any one of these transitions near the end of a letter usually announces a late main point. Avoid that mystery-story approach. Use the newspaper-article approach, which puts the most important information first and the least important last.

When Air Force Headquarters responds, it should start with its answer. By getting right to the point, it will avoid such unnecessary beginnings as "We have received your request."

It's late morning. You've just finished a so-so cup of coffee and a doughnut. In walks Max Propwash with a letter for the motor pool at Peterson AFB and a request for you. "Check this for organization problems, would you?" The fool. Doesn't he know you've taken the first part of the Effective Writing Course? You're hot!

Okay, reorganize his letter. Cross out some sentences, shift others, and renumber paragraphs—the way we did in our last two answers. Use as many principles from this part of the course as the letter allows.

SUBJECT: Request for Auxiliary Parking

1. Three years ago a courier run was started to carry computer products, some of them classified through SECRET, between Cheyenne Mountain and the Federal Building. At that time, the Directorate of Administration at Cheyenne Mountain was responsible for the courier run and stored the courier vehicle overnight there. Then, as now, the run supported the Data Systems Division.

2. Two months ago responsibility for the courier run and the vehicle (Ford pickup 79B1107) shifted to us at the Federal Building. We drive across town twice a day to pick up our courier vehicle and turn it in at your motor pool. These trips cost gasoline, mileage, time, and productivity—which can be saved by parking the vehicle after duty hours where it is needed, here in town at the Federal Building. It will be well protected. Consequently, permission is requested to park our courier vehicle on week nights and weekends at the Federal Building.

3. The Federal Building is on a quiet street and has GSA-contract guards on duty 24 hours a day. The vehicle will be parked in full view of the guard desk. (This arrangement has been endorsed by Mr. Rockwell, guard supervisor.) Because of strong lighting in front of the building, the vehicle can be seen by city police on their regular patrols. The vehicle will be locked at the end of the day, and the key and servo plate will be controlled through an access letter. In addition, we will follow all other precautions for keeping the vehicle safe.

4. In light of the above, request that consideration be given to our proposal. If you need more information about safeguarding the pickup, please call me at 635-8129.

SUBJECT: Request for Auxiliary Parking

1. ~~Three years ago a courier run was started to carry computer products, some of them classified through SECRET, between Cheyenne Mountain and the Federal Building. At that time, the Directorate of Administration at Cheyenne Mountain was responsible for the courier run and stored the courier vehicle overnight there. Then, as now, the run supported the Data Systems Division.~~

2. ~~Two months ago responsibility for the courier run and the vehicle~~ (Ford pickup 79B1107) ~~shifted to us at the Federal Building.~~ We drive across town twice a day to pick up our courier vehicle and turn it in at your motor pool. These trips cost gasoline, mileage, time, and productivity—which can be saved by parking the vehicle after duty hours where it is needed, here in town at the Federal Building. It will be well protected. ~~Consequently,~~ permission is requested to park our courier vehicle on week nights and weekends at the Federal Building.

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4. ~~In light of the above, request that consideration be given to our proposal.~~ If you need more information about safeguarding the pickup, please call me at 635-8129.

Why keep the last sentence of the letter? A phone number is an important courtesy and any letter should give one, but couldn't it go in the reply caption (which we ran out of room to show)? The answer depends on the kind of letter involved.

When writing to persuade rather than to routinely inform, end strongly—perhaps with a forecast or appeal. When feelings are involved, exit gracefully—with some expression of good will. When in doubt, offer your help or the project officer's. Propwash's letter makes a special request, so he ends it on a special note, an offer of help and a number to call. Remember, though, that most letters can just stop.

How was your doughnut?

take a break

SPEAKING ON PAPER

Imagine you're talking to your reader.

To get away from the outdated formal style, make your writing more like speaking. Now we aren't saying you should copy every quirk of speech down to grunts and ramblings. And we know that some people speak no better than they write. Still, because people "hear" writing, the most readable writing sounds like a person talking to a person. Begin by imagining your reader is in front of you. If you're writing to many different readers and no one in particular, picture a typical reader. Then apply the following tips—the best of speaking. Up-to-date writing suggests up-to-date management.

Use personal pronouns.

Avoiding natural references to people is false modesty. When speaking for your unit or FOR THE COMMANDER, use *we, us, our.* When speaking for yourself—if you're in charge, for example—use *I, me, my*. Balance those pronouns with even more of *you* and *your*, so your reader gets the most attention. ("The service *you* receive" suggests more concern for the reader than "the service *we* provide.") We're asking you to help stamp out untouched-by-human-hands writing.

Use contractions freely.

Contractions link pronouns with verbs (*we'd, I'll, you're*) and make verbs negative (*don't, can't, won't*). Only a few subjects, like reprimands or funeral notices, are too solemn for the informality of contractions. Day-to-day Air Force writing should be informal enough for contractions to fit naturally.

Ask more questions.

Use questions now and then to call attention to what you want. You reach out to your reader when you end a sentence with a question mark. In a long report, a question can be a welcome change. Hear how spoken a question is?

Use small words.

Want to get a laugh from readers sensitive to language? Substitute pompous words for small ones. Don't *start* things; *initiate* them. Don't *end* things; *terminate* them. Think of the dude in those old Westerns who overdressed to impress the folks at the ranch. Overdressed writing fails just as foolishly. Readers may know *utilize* means *use* and *optimum* means *best*, but why force them to translate? Come across as a sensible person, someone who knows good English is ordinary English.

Keep sentences short.

Though short sentences won't guarantee clarity, they're usually less confusing than long ones. Mix short and long sentences for variety, but average no more than 20 words. You needn't count every word to find your average. Instead, average about two typed lines.

by permission of Saturday Review

Use personal pronouns, contractions, and small words to turn these fancy sentences into ordinary English. Follow the example by working with one underlining at a time. If you're stumped, check Simpler Words and Phrases on page 69.

X. You'll hear by 15 September whether we've favorably approved this recommendation.

1. All addressees must implement the new policy prior to 1 April.

2. It is realized that you will have to effect numerous modifications to current procedures expeditiously.

3. However, the magnitude of the resulting savings should be sufficient to make up for the disruption.

4. If more personnel will be required to accomplish the assignments identified in the attachment, request you notify this office.

1. All addressees must implement the new policy prior to 1 April.

   Though you can replace *all addressees* with *everyone*, *you* is the better choice. It's more direct.

2. It is realized that you will have to effect numerous modifications to current procedures expeditiously.

3. However, the magnitude of the resulting savings should be sufficient to make up for the disruption.

   Favor short, spoken transitions over long, bookish ones. Use *but* more than *however*, *so* more than *therefore*, and *also* more than *in addition*. And use the professional writer's technique of starting sentences now and then with conjunctions like *and*, *so*, and *but*.

4. If more personnel will be required to accomplish the assignments identified in the attachment, request you notify this office.

   You may have trouble kicking the habit of starting a request with the word *request*. Kick it anyway. In talking right to someone, you wouldn't use *request* the way sentence 4 does.

5. Request compliance with paragraph 4 by forwarding a list of those who have elected remuneration in lieu of a subsequent transfer.

6. We are endeavoring to minimize problems, where feasible, before they adversely affect our progress.

7. We will disseminate additional guidance soon.

8. **ASK A QUESTION:** Permission is requested to park our courier vehicle on week nights and weekends at the Federal Building.

5. Please follow Request compliance with paragraph 4 by forwarding a list of those who have sending who've elected remuneration in lieu of a subsequent transfer. cheque pay instead later

6. We're trying We are endeavoring to minimize problems, where feasible, before they reduce(or) keep down possible(or) we can hurt adversely affect our progress.

> Except for special emphasis, avoid starting more than two sentences in a row with *we*. This way you'll avoid tiresome repetition and any appearance of self-centeredness.

7. We'll issue(or) and more We will disseminate additional guidance soon.

> Though we all know what *additional* means, the word is still fancy. Any word is fancy when you can substitute a smaller word without changing the meaning.

8. ASK A QUESTION: ~~Permission is requested to~~ May we park our courier vehicle on week nights and weekends at the Federal Building.?

The sentence below the example is much too long. Break it up by adding periods. You'll have to tinker with a few words to make the new sentences read well.

X. I am not able to point out unusually bad examples of the deficiencies that I have listed ~~in that~~ They are not to be found in one or two horror cases that I could bring to your attention. ~~although~~ However, I recall a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense that was wordy and excessively detailed when, in fact, we had very little of significance to say. ~~and~~ Another recent offender was guilty of laborious expressions that are best described as "constipated writing."

Quality and quantity in communication tend to have an inverse relationship, for as Mark Twain once said, "If I'd had more time, I'd have written a shorter book," and indeed virtually every day I see too many reports and memos, and many of those are too long—too much short-term raw information with too little long-term meaning—in that, as often as not, I'm offered three pages when three sentences would tell the story better and two sentences a week or so downstream would tell it better still.

Though several answers would work for almost any exercise, we've usually suggested only one to simplify things. Here, though, we suggest a single fix to show you how two successful writers have kept their sentences short.

The example began as part of a 1963 memo from Eugene Zuckert, Air Force Secretary, to General Curtis LeMay, Chief of Staff.

The statement you edited began as part of a 1977 letter from General David Jones, Chief of Staff, to all Air Force generals.

Quality and quantity in communication tend to have an inverse relationship. ~~for~~ As Mark Twain once said, "If I'd had more time, I'd have written a shorter book." ~~and indeed~~ Virtually every day I see too many reports and memos, and many of those are too long—too much short-term raw information with too little long-term meaning. ~~in that,~~ As often as not, I'm offered three pages when three sentences would tell the story better and two sentences a week or so downstream would tell it better still.

AVOIDING NEEDLESS WORDS

Had we made a film on economy in writing, it would have come here. Economy follows naturally from the principle that writing should sound like speaking, only tidied up. But our captain couldn't revise his roofing letter forever, and other subjects pressed for emphasis on film.

Still, effective writing is economical writing. Once you've included only necessary ideas, work to avoid using more words than those ideas deserve. Unfortunately, writing can be wordy in so many ways that the best advice we can give you is awfully general: suspect wordiness in everything you write. Quarrel with every paragraph, every sentence, every word. When deadlines permit, let your writing rest for a day and then rewrite it. And rewrite it.

Take a quarrelsome approach to the common types of wordiness listed on the next page. After you read about them, go on to the exercises for Avoiding Needless Words, the film we didn't make.

I think it means he wants us to maximize the impacted systemic-societal interface understandability by case-modifying our vernacular models, jargonwise. But the way it's written, I can't be sure.
USE PLAIN ENGLISH
-pc

by permission of Rky Mtn News

Doublings

Avoid writing about a project's *importance and significance* when *importance* will do. Avoid writing about a person's *success and achievement* when *success* will do. Pairs of words with similar meanings add needless bulk to writing. Whatever the differences between *test and evaluate*, for example, they aren't worth calling attention to if you just want to give a general idea.

"It is"

No two words hurt Air Force writing more than the innocent-looking *it is*. They stretch sentences, delay your point, and encourage passive verbs. Unless *it* refers to something mentioned earlier, try to write around *it is*. For example, *"It is recommended* that you write economically" can become *"We recommend* that you write economically." Less common but no less wordy are cousins of *it is* like *there is* and *there are*.

Smothered Verbs

Weak writing wastes verbs, the only words that can do things, by relying on general ones. Don't use a general verb (*make*) plus extra words (*a choice*) when you can use one specific verb (*choose*). Here are some common smothered (and unsmothered) verbs. "The committee members *held a meeting* (*met*) to *give consideration to (consider)* the plan. They *made the decision (decided)* to *give their approval to (approve)* it." Get the idea? *Make use of* ( ) specific verbs!

"That" and "Which"

Don't use *that* and *which* unless they help meaning or flow. Sometimes you can just drop these words: "We believe ~~*that*~~ the changes ~~*which*~~ they asked for won't raise costs." Sometimes you'll have to rewrite slightly: "a system *that is* reliable" becomes "a reliable system." Check each *that* and *which* to make sure you need it.

Wordy Expressions

Wordy expressions are needless phrases introduced by prepositions like *at, on, for, in, to,* and *by*. They don't give sentences impressive bulk; they weaken them by cluttering the words that carry the meaning. So prune such deadwood as *for the purpose of (to), during periods when (when),* and *by means of (by).* The longer you take to say something, the weaker you come across.

Hut-2-3-4 Phrases

Though you should cut out needless words, sometimes you can go too far. Don't build hut-2-3-4 phrases, long trains of nouns and modifiers. Readers can't tell easily what modifies what or when such trains will end. You may have to use official hut-2-3-4 phrases like "Air Traffic Control Radar Beacon System," but you can avoid creating unofficial ones like "increased high-cost-area allowances." Adding one small word will make it more readable: "increased allowances *for* high-cost areas."

* * *

OLD: "By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution of the United States of America, and as President of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered as follows. . . ."

NEW: "As President of the United States, I direct. . . ."

—old and new beginnings to Executive Orders

As you work through the exercises for each type of wordiness, look for one or two errors in any sentence. You may want to return to the rules now and then to refresh your memory.

Tighten the following sentences by avoiding doublings.

X. Discuss ~~and explain~~ any special factors ~~and considerations~~ in an attachment.

1. The intent of this policy and guidance is to limit smoke and noise during engine tests.

2. Only the vice commander may modify or adjust scheduled training for administrative and/or communications personnel.

3. The exercise will begin on or about 5 October and last for 14 days.

1. The intent of this policy ~~and guidance~~ is to limit smoke and noise during engine tests.

OK

2. Only the vice commander may ~~modify or~~ adjust scheduled training for administrative ~~and/~~or communications personnel.

3. The exercise will begin ~~on or~~ about 5 October and last for 14 days.

Make the changes needed to avoid delayers like *it is* and *there are*.

X. ~~It is a pleasure for me~~ I'm pleased to see your progress.

1. It is our opinion that the quality of the program has improved.

2. There was no requirement in AFR 11-4 that prevented such host-tenant agreements.

3. It will be our goal to make sure there are opportunities for everyone.

4. It is not mandatory that leave be taken when it is requested, but it is necessary that you request it.

1. ~~It is our opinion~~ We believe (or) Our opinion is that the quality of the program has improved.

2. ~~There was~~ No requirement in AFR 11-4 ~~that~~ prevented such host-tenant agreements.

3. ~~It will be~~ our goal will be to make sure ~~there are opportunities for~~ everyone has opportunities.

4. ~~It is not mandatory that~~ Leave must (or) need to be taken when it is OK requested, but ~~it is necessary that~~ you request it.

Tighten the following sentences by avoiding smothered verbs.

X. AFR 13-1 ~~provides guidance for~~ guides the Air Force Writing Program.

1. Your complaint about Martians in your silly putty makes reference to correspondence we haven't received.

2. Offices having a requirement for this report should give a brief explanation of their uses for it.

3. Paragraph 3a makes provision for storing extra supplies and is applicable to all units.

* * *

Look at your work as though it were done by your enemy. . . . If we look to see where it is wrong, we shall see this and make it right. If we look at it to see where it is right, we shall see this and not make it right.

—Samuel Butler, English novelist

1. Your complaint about Martians in your silly putty ~~makes~~ ~~reference~~ to correspondence we haven't received.

2. Offices ~~having a requirement for~~ requiring (or) needing this report should ~~give a brief explanation of~~ briefly explain their uses for it.

3. Paragraph 3a ~~makes provision~~ provides for storing extra supplies and ~~is applicable~~ applies to all units.

Get rid of needless *that*s and *which*es by simply dropping them or rewriting slightly. Don't get carried away, though. Keep the ones *that* help meaning or flow.

X. In that case, we believe ~~that~~ they should go.

1. Sentences that are short are easier to read than sentences that are long.

2. That's the report that you wrote.

3. We'll check for any flaws that exist in the program.

1. Sentences ~~that are short~~ are easier to read than sentences ~~that are long.~~

2. That's the report ~~that~~ you wrote.

3. We'll check for any flaws ~~that exist~~ in the program.

Tighten the following sentences by replacing wordy expressions.

X. ~~In the event that~~ all else fails, it can be repaired by ~~means of~~ a swift kick to the framistan.

1. In accordance with AFR 75-10, reports must be filed on a quarterly basis.

2. In the month of January, they will start a study for the purpose of testing compliance with the new policy.

3. We'll revise our approach in the near future in order to improve operational readiness.

1. ~~In accordance with~~ Under AFR 75-10, reports must be filed ~~on a~~ quarterly ~~basis~~.

2. In ~~the month of~~ January, they will start a study ~~for the purpose of~~ To testing compliance with the new policy.

3. We'll revise our approach ~~in the near future~~ soon ~~in order~~ to improve operational readiness.

Make the sentences more readable by rewriting the hut-2-3-4 phrases.

X. PROJECT BLUE will benefit from ~~computer programs~~ on computer programs advance information.

1. Rapid operational equipment distribution is a strength of the new plan.

2. Your manning-level authorizations reassessment suggestion should lead to major improvements.

3. The regulation explains Communications Center operations personnel training.

1. Rapid operational equipment ~~distribution~~ distribution of is a strength of the new plan.

2. Your manning-level authorizations ~~reassessment suggestion~~ suggestion to reassess should lead to major improvements.

3. The regulation explains Communications Center operations personnel training. Huh?

> We give up. Does this hut-2-3-4 phrase mean "training *for* operations personnel *from the* Communications Center"? Or does it mean "training *of* personnel *in the* operations *of the* Communications Center"? We're not sure. And that's the trouble with such monsters.

* * *

Orderly time-phased priority-based civil engineering work planning and design budgeting supply and procurement center support was not maintained.

— world's longest hut-2-3-4 phrase

Remember Max Propwash from the summary exercise for Organizing Your Ideas? Well, he changed jobs. Now he's with the Security Police at the Air Force Academy, and he's heading toward your desk. Duck into a drawer! Pretend you're a stapler! Too late.

Simplify his bulletin notice so it uses the rules for Speaking on Paper and Avoiding Needless Words. Read the first sentence and our changes to get the idea. Then go on to talk to a reader with small words and few of them.

DRIVING CONDITIONS DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS: ~~The propensity for visitors to the~~ Academy visitors ~~to exhibit erratic~~ driving ~~behavior during the~~ poorly in summer ~~months is~~ especially ~~prevalent~~ at the north and south gates. Sudden stops and changes of lanes are frequent practices that seriously increase the potential for an accident at these locations. In order to ensure personal safety as well as to permit proper and sufficient reaction time, it is essential that personnel obey the posted speed limits. Although the majority of personnel do not speed, there are a number of drivers who frequently enter the installation traveling at speeds in excess of 25mph. In an effort to correct this serious and unsafe situation, Security Police will be selectively enforcing the speed limits at the gates through the operation of moving and stationary radar traffic monitoring devices.

DRIVING CONDITIONS DURING ~~THE~~ SUMMER ~~MONTHS~~: ~~The propensity for visitors to the~~ Academy ~~to exhibit erratic~~ driving ~~behavior during the~~ summer ~~months is~~ especially ~~prevalent~~ at the north and south gates. ~~Sudden stops~~ and ~~changes of~~ lanes ~~are frequent practices that seriously~~ increase the ~~potential~~ for an accident ~~at these locations. In order~~ to ~~ensure personal safety as well as to permit proper and sufficient~~ reaction time, ~~it is essential that personnel~~ obey the ~~posted~~ speed limits. ~~Although the majority of personnel do not~~ speed, ~~there are a number of~~ drivers ~~who frequently~~ enter the ~~installation~~ traveling ~~at speeds in excess of~~ 25mph. ~~In an effort~~ to correct this ~~serious and~~ unsafe situation, Security Police will ~~be selectively~~ enforcing the speed limits at the gates through ~~the operation of moving and stationary~~ radar ~~traffic monitoring devices.~~

The original notice is formal and wordy. But if you go too far in avoiding these problems, you may become chummy or telegraphic. The trick is to strike a balance between those extremes.

~~take a~~ break

SOLVING SPECIAL PROBLEMS

Write actively, doers before verbs.

To spot passive verbs, look for any form of *to be* plus a main verb ending usually in *-en* or *-ed*. Forms of *to be: is, are, was, were, am, be, being, been.* So passive verbs look like these: *was inspected, has been chosen, is being closed, may be reopened.*

Sentences written passively are wordy and roundabout. They reverse the natural, active order of English sentences. In the passive example below, notice how the receiver of the verb's action comes before the verb and the doer comes after:

Active: The commander inspected the base.
(*doer*) (verb) (*receiver*)

Passive: The base was inspected by the commander.
(*receiver*) (verb) (*doer*)

Besides lengthening and twisting sentences, passive verbs often muddy them. Whereas active sentences must have doers, passive ones are complete without them:

Nominations must be approved beforehand. By whom?

Plans are being made. By whom??

Your proposal has been changed. By whom???

You will be notified. By whom????

To avoid most passive verbs, find the doer of the verb's action and put it before the verb. By leading with the doer, you'll automatically follow with an active verb:

The commander must approve nominations beforehand.

We are making plans.

They have changed your proposal.

I will notify you.

Now and then you can avoid a passive verb without rearranging the sentence. Simply change the verb or drop part of it:

Your request has ~~been received~~ arrived.

The Academy is ~~located~~ in Colorado.

Write actively most of the time. Over 75 percent of the verbs in magazines and newspapers, the kinds of writing we like to read, are active. But some Air Force writers make 75 percent of their verbs passive. Because passive verbs look back to whatever receives the action, reading passive sentences is like driving in reverse.

Write passively now and then—when you have good reason not to say who or what does the action. This situation may occur if the doer is unknown, unimportant, obvious, or better left unsaid:

• • •

Writing is just work—there's no secret. If you dictate or use a pen or type or write with your toes—it is still work.

—Sinclair Lewis, novelist

Doer obvious: Presidents are elected every four years.

Doer perhaps unimportant: The parts have been shipped.

This isn't a license to kill. When in doubt write actively, even though the doer might seem obvious or unimportant. You'll write livelier sentences (not, livelier sentences will be written). The point is to make your use of passives deliberate and infrequent.

* * *

Instructions deserve special attention because we write so many of them, often with so many passives. When you describe how to do something, talk directly to your audience by leading with verbs. (This isn't a new way to turn passive sentences into active ones. A doer, *you*, will be understood or stated in front of the verb.) The captain in the film learns this approach when he makes these changes:

Driveways *must be cleared.* ——→ *Clear* your driveway.

Front doors *will be avoided.* ——→ *Avoid* your front door.

He leads with verbs as he talks to a typical occupant of base quarters.

If your writing in general and your instructions in particular sound like the work of an important person, they're probably poor. Let the signature on a letter or the number on a regulation carry the authority; don't try to put it in your language. Write actively, as if someone has just walked up to you and asked what to do.

To improve instructions further, apply these next techniques: (a) state rules before exceptions, (b) stress important points, (c) choose exact words, (d) say who does what, (e) give examples for difficult ideas, (f) divide processes into small steps, (g) use parallel lists, subparagraphs, and headings, (h) average only 15 words a sentence, (i) answer likely questions, (j) test your material, and (k) rewrite to avoid ambiguity. Until Murphy's Law is rescinded, you must write so you cannot be misunderstood.

Keep lists parallel.

In lists, stick to one pattern. By avoiding interruptions, you set up expectations that make reading easy. Violations of parallelism occur most often when writers mix the following:

Things and actions,

Statements and questions,

Active instructions and passive ones.

In the paragraph just above "Keep lists parallel," all the instructions (a-k) are active and therefore parallel. The list would lose its parallelism if *c* used a passive verb ("exact words must be chosen") or if *e* used things ("examples for difficult ideas"). The trick is to be consistent. Make ideas of equal importance look equal.

NOTES

* * *

Communication is never having to say "Huh?"

Turn these passive sentences into active ones, like this:

this plan gives free dental care.

X. Free dental care is given under this plan.

1. Farkled fibbets are explained in the attachment.

2. A plane was taken by me to Kelly AFB and some parts were picked up there.

3. Your support is appreciated.
(Assume you're writing on behalf of your organization.)

4. It has been decided by the commander that more decisions should be made by element leaders.

5. Your requests must be approved beforehand.

1. The attachment explains farkled fibbets.

   Verbs have tense and voice. A verb in any tense (past, present, future) may be in either voice (active or passive). The verb *are explained* uses the present tense and passive voice. As for doers, they may be anything—people, ideas, attachments, or farkled fibbets.

2. I took a plane to Kelly AFB and picked up some parts there.

   We'd *say* this active version. Most verbs in speaking are active. Unfortunately, many Air Force people would *write* the awkward passive version.

3. We appreciate your support.

   "Your support *is appreciated*" sends the wrong signals. The passive verb and missing *we* announce that your writing style, and perhaps your management style, is out of date.

   Can you overdo personal pronouns? Rarely. Still, to avoid an accusation, you might say passively "Little *has been done* to correct the problem" instead of "*You* have done little to correct the problem."

4. The commander has decided that element leaders should make more decisions.

   Don't let *should be made* fool you. It's passive even though the main verb doesn't end in *-en* or *-ed*. The past participle of *to make* is irregular.

5. ? must approve your requests beforehand.

   Just who must do the approving? This sentence from a regulation doesn't say. Avoid this serious misuse of doer-less passives. Make sure policy statements say who does what. Say, for example, "The commander must approve your requests beforehand."

In the last exercise, all of the sentences were passive. But no more nice guys. In this exercise, only some of the sentences are passive. Rewrite the passive sentences but do nothing with the active ones. (You saw the sentences earlier as the third paragraph in the final exercise for Organizing Your Ideas.)

1. The Federal Building is on a quiet street and has GSA-contract guards on duty 24 hours a day.

2. The vehicle will be parked in full view of the guard desk.

3. (This arrangement has been endorsed by Mr. Rockwell, guard supervisor.)

4. Because of strong lighting in front of the building, the vehicle can be seen by city police on their regular patrols.

5. The vehicle will be locked at the end of the day, and the key and servo plate will be controlled through an access letter.

6. In addition, we will follow all other precautions for keeping the vehicle safe.

1. NO PASSIVE VERBS

2. We will park the vehicle in full view of the guard desk.

   Though we could have left the sentence passive without causing confusion, the active version makes a stronger, more direct sentence and leaves no doubt that *we* take responsibility. Another fix would be to just drop the main verb: "The vehicle will be ~~parked~~ in full view of the guard desk."

3. (Mr. Rockwell, guard supervisor, has endorsed this arrangement.)

   Though we had to find a doer for sentence 2 from the context of the paragraph, we had an easier time with sentence 3. We simply flipped the doer from the end of the sentence to the start.

4. Because of strong lighting in front of the building, city police can see the vehicle on their regular patrols.

5. We will lock the vehicle at the end of the day and control the key and servo plate through an access letter.

6. NO PASSIVE VERBS

Rewrite the two bulletin notices that have bad cases of passives. Do nothing with the one notice that already talks directly to a typical reader.

A. FAMILY-HOUSING OCCUPANTS DEPARTING IN JUNE: Preliminary quarters inspections must be scheduled in April for family-housing occupants due to depart during June. Questions should be directed to Annunzio Blatz, x2100. (DEH/8413)

B. PRINTING: Please don't make your printing request a "rush job." Submit it far enough ahead to allow us a reasonable amount of time. (DAR/2355)

C. CORRECTIONS TO TELEPHONE DIRECTORY: The base telephone directory should be checked by all personnel to make sure their listings are correct. DAA must be notified by 28 September if any changes are needed. (DAA/2354)

A. FAMILY-HOUSING OCCUPANTS DEPARTING IN JUNE: Schedule your preliminary quarters inspection in April. Direct questions to Annunzio Blatz, x2100. (DEH/8413)

Direct instructions to a typical reader are easier to write when a heading names the audience. When you use the heading to highlight something else, you can sometimes start the first sentence like this: "If you'll be leaving base quarters in June, ..."

B. NO CHANGE

C. CORRECTIONS TO TELEPHONE DIRECTORY: Please check the base telephone directory to make sure your listing is correct. Notify us by 28 September if you need any changes. (DAA/2354)

You made the last notice active if you said "*All personnel* should check . . . ." However, you could have been more direct by starting the first sentence with "*You* should check . . ." or "Check . . ." or "Please check . . . ." Only one person at a time reads what you write, so try to engage that one reader.

This isn't a course in how to write swell bulletin notices, but they do offer rich examples of poor writing, and it isn't far from instructions in bulletins to regulations and operating instructions.

Here's our only exercise on parallelism—sticking to one pattern in a list. Though the list below gives instructions from a base regulation, you'd improve in the same way a list giving, say, recommendations in a background paper or objectives in a manual. You'd line things up so each part begins with a verb, like this:

X. ~~Adherence to~~ Follow these fire-prevention rules ~~is required.~~

1. Trash will be put in containers outside the building at the end of each day.

2. The use of any electrical appliance will be in accordance with MAFBR 92-1.

3. Use alarm boxes, fire extinguishers, and other fire-protection equipment in case of fire only.

4. Assembly area for this building during a fire is the south parking lot.

5. Fire lanes must be kept clear at all times.

1. Put trash in containers outside the building at the end of each day.

   Sometimes parallelism involves lining up several ideas for easy comparison, the way we have in the first three sentences of this paragraph. Sometimes it involves being grammatically consistent by not mixing clauses with phrases in lists (for more on this kind of parallelism, check a grammar text). But at its most noticeable, parallelism involves starting lists of instructions, recommendations, and objectives with verbs. Mastering this bold kind of parallelism will help you master subtler kinds.

2. Follow MAFBR 92-1 when using any electrical appliance.

3. NO CHANGE

4. Assemble during a fire in the south parking lot.

   If you wanted to stress the idea of *during a fire*, you could have written "*During a fire,* assemble in the south parking lot." The part of the sentence that can stand by itself (the main clause) would still begin with an active verb, *assemble*.

5. Keep fire lanes clear at all times.

Passives are the worst problem in the following letter from Wright-Patterson AFB. Make them active. And make other word changes that will produce plain English.

SUBJECT: Transfer of Accountability (Your ltr, 5 Sep 79)

1. Please be advised that no objection to the transfer of accountability identified in subject letter is interposed by this office. Request that your records be properly documented to reflect the transfer. Included in your records should be your letter to Acme Missiles and your letter to this office. Also include this letter.

2. Any questions relative to this matter may be directed to our new project officer, Mr. Propwash, at telephone 782-2357. (He gets around, doesn't he?)

SUBJECT: Transfer of Accountability (Your ltr, 5 Sep 79)

SUBJECT: Transfer of Accountability (Your ltr, 5 Sep 79)

1. We don't object to the transfer of accountability. Just show the transfer in your records. They should include your letter to Acme Missiles, your letter to us, and this letter.

2. If you have any questions, please call our new project officer, Mr. Propwash, at 782-2357.

The original letter, like much ineffective writing, needs more than one kind of improvement. The second sentence illustrates the point. Made active, it reads "Request that you properly document your records to reflect the transfer." Though better than the original, this active version still needs work because of *request, properly document,* and *reflect.* So our final revision avoids passives plus other sources of wordy formality.

We combined the last two sentences of the first paragraph to show how parallelism can improve economy. (For another illustration of economy through parallelism, combine the last two sentences on page 55.)

We kept the last sentence of the letter to flag the "new" project officer. If he hadn't been new, his name and number would have belonged in the reply caption because the letter is routine.

Here's the letter written in the film.

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY
USAF ACADEMY, COLORADO 80840

REPLY TO ATTN OF: DEE (Capt Propwash, 4338)

SUBJECT: New Roofs for Quarters 3-43

TO: Quarters_____

1. Repair Notice. We've scheduled your quarters for a new roof. Work will start on _____ and last five workdays. Contractors will replace 20 roofs this summer and 21 next summer. Our goal is to end the damage from water accumulation and the area's high winds by replacing flat roofs with sloped ones.

2. Contractor Duties. Workmen will tear off your top roof and expose ceiling beams. Then they'll nail new beams that resemble A's to the old ones. Finally, they'll cover the new beams with plywood sheets and asphalt shingles. During construction, plastic covers will keep any rain off your inside ceiling.

3. Occupant Preparations. We want to reduce your inconvenience and avoid any accidents. So please follow these instructions:

a. Clear your driveway. Heavy equipment must move to and from your house.

b. Avoid your front door during working hours. Workmen will dump scraps in front of it.

c. Remove pictures from walls. Vibrations may knock them down.

d. Keep children away from all work areas.

4. Do you expect to be away during construction? If you do, let us know by 1 June so we can reschedule you.

Philip A. Powell
PHILIP A. POWELL, Colonel, USAF
DCS/Civil Engineering

Max,
Retype the letter, would you? I'll have the colonel sign it when he returns from TDY next month.
Ed Bailey
(Sorry about the coffee spill. Great letter!)

* * *

In an operation this big, you have to expect losses.

—anonymous

A parting challenge. . .

When you get back to your office, check your IN basket. You're likely to find there many of the problems you've studied here. And for a sweatier challenge, check your OUT basket.

What really counts, though, is the attention you pay to effective writing a long time from now. A lot of bad habits are waiting for you. But you'll improve a little each time you avoid them. So when a phone call or visit just won't do, and you have to write, use plain, up-front English.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

OFFICIAL

LEW ALLEN, JR., General, USAF
Chief of Staff

VAN L. CRAWFORD, Colonel, USAF
Director of Administration

ATTACHMENTS

- checklist for effective writers
- simpler words and phrases
- books on writing

CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE WRITERS

ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS

Plan what to say.

Group related information into paragraphs.

Open with your main point.

Stick to what your reader needs.

SPEAK ON PAPER

Imagine you're talking to your reader.

Use personal pronouns.

Use contractions freely.

Ask more questions.

Use small words.

Keep sentences short.

AVOID NEEDLESS WORDS

Suspect wordiness in everything you write, and avoid

Doublings,

It is and *There are*,

Smothered verbs,

That and *which*,

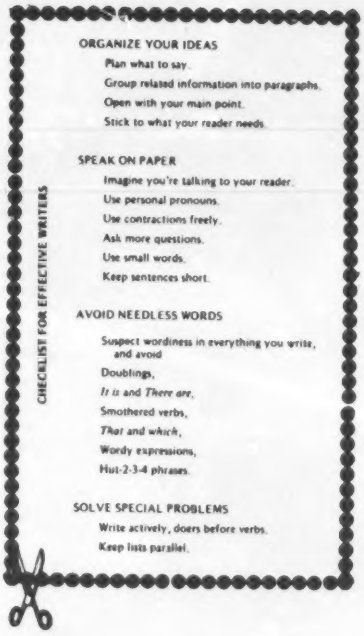
Wordy expressions,

Hut-2-3-4 phrases.

SOLVE SPECIAL PROBLEMS

Write actively, doers before verbs.

Keep lists parallel.



SIMPLER WORDS AND PHRASES

Instead of	*Try*
accompany	go with
accomplish	carry out, do
accomplish (a form)	fill out
accordingly	so
accrue	add, gain
accurate	correct, exact, right
achieve	do, make
actual	real
additional	added, more, other
adjacent to	next to
advantageous	helpful
advise	recommend, tell
affix	put, stick
afford an opportunity	allow, let
aircraft	plane
anticipate	expect
a number of	some
apparent	clear, plain
appear	seem
appreciable	many
appropriate	proper, right
approximately	about
as a means of	to
ascertain	find out, learn
as prescribed by	under
assist, assistance	aid, help
attached herewith is	here's
attempt	try
at the present time	now
benefit	help
by means of	by, with
cannot	can't
capability	ability
category	class, group
close proximity	near
combined	joint
comply	follow
component	part
comprise	form, include, make up
concerning	about, on
conclude	close, end
concur	agree
confront	face, meet
consequently	so
consolidate	combine, join, merge
constitutes	is, forms, makes up
construct	build
contains	has
continue	keep on
contribute	give
cooperate	help
currently	(leave out)
deem	think
delete	cut, drop
demonstrate	prove, show
depart	leave
designate	appoint, choose, name, pick
desire	wish
determine	decide, figure, find
develop	grow, make, take place
disclose	show
discontinue	drop, stop
disseminate	issue, send out

Instead of	*Try*
do not	don't
due to the fact that	due to, since
echelons	levels
effect	make
elect	choose, pick
eliminate	cut, drop, end
employ	use
encounter	meet
encourage	urge
endeavor	try
ensure	make sure
enumerate	count
equitable	fair
equivalent	equal
establish	set up, prove, show
evaluate	check, rate, test
evidenced	showed
evident	clear
examine	check, look at
exhibit	show
expedite	hurry, rush, speed up
expeditious	fast, quick
expend	pay out, spend
expense	cost, fee, price
explain	show, tell
facilitate	ease, help
factor	reason, cause
failed to	didn't
fatuous numbskull	jerk
feasible	can be done, workable
females	women
final	last
finalize	complete, finish
for example	such as
forfeit	give up, lose
for the purpose of	for, to
forward	send
function	act, role, work
fundamental	basic
furnish	give, send
has the capability	can
herein	here
however	but
identical	same
identify	find, name, show
immediately	at once
impacted	affected, changed, hit
implement	carry out, do, follow
in accordance with	by, under
in addition	also, besides, too
in an effort to	to
inasmuch as	since
inception	start
in conjunction with	with
incorporate	blend, join, merge
incumbent upon	must
indicate	show, write down
indication	sign
initial	first
initiate	start
in lieu of	instead of
in order that	for, so

Instead of	*Try*
in order to	to
in regard to	about, concerning, on
interpose no objection	don't object
in the amount of	for
in the course of	during, in
in the event that	if
in the near future	soon
in view of	since
in view of the above	so
it is	(leave out)
it is essential	must
it is recommended	I, we recommend
it is requested	please
justify	prove
legislation	law
limited number	few
limitations	limits
locate	find
location	place, scene, site
magnitude	size
maintain	keep, support
majority	greatest, longest, most
minimize	decrease, lessen, reduce
modify	change
monitor	check, watch
nebulous	vague
necessitate	cause, need
notify	let know, tell
numerous	many, most
objective	aim, goal
obligate	bind, compel
observe	see
obtain	get
operate	run, work
operational	working
optimum	best, greatest, most
option	choice, way
participate	take part
perform	do
permit	let
personnel	people, staff
pertaining to	about, of, on
place	put
portion	part
position	place
possess	have, own
preclude	prevent
prepared	ready
previous	earlier, past
previously	before
prioritize	rank
prior to	before
probability	chance
procedures	rules, ways
proceed	do, go on, try
proficiency	skill
programmed	planned
promulgate	announce, issue
provide	give, supply
provided that	if
provides guidance for	guides
(the) provisions of	(leave out)
purchase	buy

Instead of	*Try*
reason for	why
recapitulate	sum up
reduce	cut
reflect	say, show
regarding	about, of, on
relating to	about, on
relocation	move
remain	stay
remainder	rest
remuneration	pay, payment
render	give, make
request	ask
require	must, need
requirement	need
retain	keep
return	go back
review	check, go over
selection	choice
similar	like
solicit	ask for
state	say
subject	the, this, your
submit	give, send
subsequent	later, next
subsequently	after, later, then
substantial	large, real, strong
sufficient	enough
take appropriate measures	please
terminate	end, stop
that	(leave out)
therefore	so
there are	(leave out)
there is	(leave out)
thereof	its, their
this office	us, we
time period	(either one)
transmit	send
transpire	happen, occur
-type	(leave out)
until such time as	until
(the) use of	(leave out)
utilize, utilization	use
validate	confirm
value	cost, worth
verbatim	word for word, exact
via	in, on, through
viable	workable
warrant	call for, permit
whenever	when
whereas	since
with reference to	about
with the exception of	except for
witnessed	saw
/	and, or

BOOKS ON WRITING

Contemporary Business Writing by Michael Adelstein. Random House, 1971. Here's a thorough college text that offers excellent instruction for the working writer.

Elements of Style, third edition, by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White. Macmillan, 1972. These tips on style are sure to improve anyone's writing.

English 3200: A Programed Course in Grammar and Usage, second edition, by Joseph C. Blumenthal. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972. Readers learn grammar, punctuation, and sentence construction by progressing through a series of questions and answers.

Gobbledygook Has Gotta Go by John O'Hayre, 1966. Though the examples come from the Bureau of Land Management, the problems are those of the Air Force. Order through Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20302.

Guide for Air Force Writing, AF Pamphlet 13-2, 1973. This handbook covers some general principles and applies them to a few types of Air Force writing. Send AF Form 764a to your base Publications Distribution Office.

Handbook of Technical Writing by Charles T. Brusaw, Gerald J. Alred, and Walter E. Oliu. St. Martin's Press, 1976. Besides covering the elements of technical reports, this sometimes-fussy reference answers hundreds of questions on grammar and punctuation.

Harbrace College Handbook, eighth edition, by John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977. This reference text on grammar and punctuation is among the best.

Rudolph Flesch on Business Communications by, you guessed it, Rudolph Flesch. Barnes and Noble, 1974. This small book is the best of many fine books by the leading advocate of spoken writing.

Tongue and Quill, third edition, by Lt Col H. A. Staley, Air Command and Staff College, 1977. Here's detailed advice on how to prepare everything from staff briefings and talking papers to staff summary sheets and trip reports. Send a self-addressed mailing label to ECI/EDS Maxwell AFB, AL 36112.

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